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ABSTRACT

A recent California Supreme Court ruling required San Diego Unified School District to implement a course of study in its minority isolated schools that would result in 50 percent of the students achieving at or above national norms on the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills. In response to the court order, the district initiated the Achievement Goals Program, in which a curriculum is defined, specified, and arranged in levels to accommodate a range of entry level skills. The teacher teaches an instructional unit for two weeks, then administers the first of two parallel forms of a mastery test. A three-day reteaching cycle provides additional help for those experiencing difficulty. The school year is divided into 12 instructional units in reading and mathematics, each assessed for mastery with provisions for the reteaching cycle. Initial reaction to the program from teachers and students has been favorable. (JEH)

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# A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON THE USE OF EVALUATION DATA IN TITLE I SCHOOLS ALSO INVOLVED IN A COURT-ORDERED INTEGRATION PROGRAM*

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San Diego City Schools is in its fourth year of a court-ordered integration program which, until the recent California Supreme Court ruling, was unique in the nation in that it was based on voluntary participation. During the past year, emphasis has shifted from focusing strictly on the racial composition of schools to include also "quality education." The latter term was operationally defined by the court in the following order, and I quote:

> "Implement a course or courses of study in all minority isolated schools which will result, by the dates indicated in the table below, in 50% of the students in the isolated schools achieving at or above the national norm on the Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills (CTBS) in reading, mathematics, and language."

The timetable requires the attainment of this standard over the next four years, starting with kindergarten by 1982, Grades 1 and 2 by 1983, Grades 3 through 6 by 1984, and Grades 7 through 12 by 1985.

The connection with Title I is obvious. All minority-isolated schools are in the Title I program, and the CTBS is the principal outcome measure for Title I. evaluation. Now, it should come as no surprise that a crucial contingency in Title I is the money associated with the number of target students based on low test scores--hardly an incentive for dramatic gains in achievement. Contrast this to a court order to raise these same test scores in a cluster of Title I schools, with a court-mandated and monitored instructional program to accomplish just that.

As soon as we heard of the intended court order, and that our current Board of Education was unwilling to challenge its unreasonableness and risk further rebukes from an impatient judge for foot dragging, we went back to the drawing boards to consider what kind of an instructional program had the best chance of delivering the goods.

As early as 1975, our district had become involved in the evaluation of a statewide primary reading program based principally on individualized instruction and a nebulous requirement to "restructure" the classroom. To no one's surprise in this room, in the light of all the recent research on teacher effectiveness, the rampant and often arbitrary changes this unleashed precipitated a noticeable destructuring of the state's primary reading program. It was not long before San Diego observed a trend toward declining reading scores. In search of some explanation for this most disturbing and controversial finding, our district became acquainted with the work of Dave Berliner at the Far West Lab who was deep in the data collection and preliminary analysis of the Beginning Teacher Evaluation Study. We soon learned about the importance of academic learning time and its alias: time-on-task. We became one of the first districts to

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inservice its teaching staff on this highly practical topic and soon observed a modest but consistent rise in our test scores districtwide. Of the so-called minority isolated schools--all in Title I--gains over the previous year occurred in two out of every three schools. We knew at last we were on to something. What was particularly impressive was the cost effectiveness of the intervention: following workshops by the staff of the Far West Lab, principals were given their own two-hour inservice package and asked to carry the message to their teachers. It all reminded me of the scene in "The Music Man" when Professor Harold Hill, finally cornered, pleaded with his raw recruits to put their instruments to their lips and "think" the notes out. Slowly, teetering on the edge of sheer dissonance, something faintly resembling music emerged. Apparently, in our own reading program, just talking about the conditions conducive to time-on-task elicited sufficient increased efficiency to nudge our test scores upward.

As an outgrowth of these studies, San Diego City Schools was selected to participate in a related interactive teaching study, working again with the Far West Lab. The focus of this research was upon observations of the number and kind of classroom distractions, as well as the effectiveness of various teacher coping strategies to reduce these distractions.

The principal missing component necessary to close the circle of our endeavor was a customized instructional program which would take dead aim at the content objectives covered by the California curriculum framework as well as the CTBS. I am indebted to Bob Smith at the University of Southern California for calling to my attention Benjamin Bloom's book, Human Characteristics and School Learning. What better thing to do than climb aboard the mastery learning train, and what better place to climb aboard than the University of Chicago with chief engineer Ben Bloom himself in the cab? When things are right, they're right. I picked up the phone, obtained his number from the university switchboard, and, of all people, guess who answered the call--no answering service to take a message; no secretary to tell me he wasn't available--just plain "Hello" and a rather startled response from me, "Oh, is this Dr. Bloom?"

Arrangements were made for an afternoon's visit in his office with our Deputy Superintendent, in charge of instruction, and me. It was an illuminating two hours. The meeting, I hasten to confess, got off to a shaky start when I casually mentioned that, among other things, our chief interest in mastery learning was to aim for the court-imposed standard on the norm-referenced CTBS. He looked at us as if we had just walked in out of the rain and soaked to the skin. He said something like, "What a stupid thing to do! You don't use a norm-referenced test to measure mastery learning. If you came all the way from California to drop that turkey in my lap, you've wasted your time and I'll not waste mine." Having failed my first formative test in mastery learning at the hands of the master himself, I'm pleased to report he then generously shifted to the feedback corrective loop and we next learned--I dare not claim we mastered the point--that this was also the engine that drives the mastery learning train.

We returned to San Diego and set into motion our own adaptation of mastery learning called the Achievement Goals Program, complete with implementation, progress, and outcome evaluation. I must confess my feelings at this point.

I had the novel and heady sensation that, perhaps for the first time in our district's history--or at least the eight years of my own tenure as the Evaluation Services Director--we were actually about to conduct full-scale, hard-nosed, let-the-chips-fall-where-they-may program evaluation.

In the past, we had gone to great pains to point out all the shortcomings of norm-referenced achievement batteries and how the resulting test scores were just one indicator among many reflecting the quality of education. This left each school free to draw up its own list of additional indicators growing out of their respective school site plans. Then came the court and its imposed single standard. Suddenly, for good or ill, there was one drummer, and all eleven schools were stepping out smartly in unison.

Called the Achievement Goals Program, and currently aimed at reading and mathematics in the elementary grades, its basic paradigm is simple. A curriculum is defined, carefully specified, and then arranged in levels to accommodate a range of entry level skills. The teacher teaches an instructional unit for approximately two weeks, then administers the first of two parallel forms of a mastery test. For those who fail to show mastery, there is a short two- or three-day reteaching cycle, and then the second form of the mastery test is administered, after which the next instructional unit begins. As Dr. Bloom deeply impressed upon us in Chicago, for the first time in the lives of most of the students with whom we would be working, instead of the majority of them having only a foggy notion of what was going on--a confusion only compounded by moving on to new instruction--they would now find themselves up to speed with everyone else, lesson after lesson. For the school year there are 12 such instructional units in reading and math, each assessed for mastery with provisions for the reteaching cycle. In addition, following every third unit, a special cumulative test is given to assess progress on objectives common within that instructional sequence to both the instructional program and the CTBS. This will eventually provide the basis for modifications to the instructional program and its materials.

Reactions to the program, and especially the flow of evaluation data from both teachers and students, have been surprisingly positive with conversion experiences among the diehards by the dozens. The impact of the evaluation feedback, particularly by teachers upon the program developers and by the mastery tests upon student motivation and productivity, is nothing short of remarkable. Nearly everyone feels the program is working. Nearly everyone is sure the test scores will show that it's working. We who collect and report out the test scores try to temper the enthusiasm and speak in terms of a three- to five-year cycle to revise and fine-tune a massive new instructional program. But never in my personal professional experience have I seen so much energy and enterprise focused on evaluation data for the expressed purpose of the improvement of achievement in a school district.

I am aware of the pitfalls--the largest two being dashed hopes if the traditionally insensitive norm-referenced test scores don't respond, and dashed credibility if the scores leap forward beyond all reasonable bounds. But there is a third possibility: the test results will show encouraging progress which will earn credibility between the district, the minority community, and the court. This will give the district time to undertake the development of a parallel testing program that is criterion-referenced. With both sets of scores available, it is hoped the court, and everyone else, will begin to appreciate the significance of what each type of instrument has to offer.

In conclusion, let me make another confession. In these days there are two things which I enjoy: telling my professional colleagues of our incredible plight in San Diego brought on by the court's high-handed order, then sharing in their righteous indignation; and observing what is going on in classrooms that is nothing short of astonishing. It may all come tumbling down but, adventurer and romantic that I am, we may be on the threshold of one of those fortunate accidents by which the state of the art advances; when, in the wrong circumstances, the right thing happens. Perhaps I'm only saying I'd rather dream than gnash my teeth.

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